1: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FT7 Yao FT7



Yao make square houses.[1] Panelled doors and glass windows, deck-chairs and palm furniture are becoming more and more popular. The men wear long Moslem robes and the women are clothed in cotton. In the rural areas there are usually a few craftsmen who still ply their trades as carpenters and blacksmiths, though the latter no longer smelt, but use scrap-iron.

### Labour Migration

Statistics are not available for the Yao of Portuguese East Africa or Tanganyika Territory. Yao constitute 34 per cent. of the total population of South Nyasa district, 15 per cent. of upper Shire, 11 per cent. of Blantyre and Zomba.[2] The proportion of labour migrants in these districts was in 1937 as follows:[3]

| *District* | *Adult males fit to work* | *Percentage of emigrants* | *Number producing economic crops* | *Number of subsistence producers* | *Emigrants not heard of since 1930* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Nyasa . | 24,230 | 27·1 | 2,912 (12%) | 12,025 (49%) | 873 |
| Upper Shire . | 24,673 | 15·9 | 2,555 (10%) | 16,629 (67%) | 255 |
| Blantyre . . | 25,330 | 15·6 | 3,788 (15%) | 10,165 (40%) | 986 |
| Zomba . . | 26,679 | 12·4 | 7,720 (29%) | 9,040 (33%) | 553 |

South Nyasa district, which is unfertile waterless bush with a long history of famine and food shortage, has the highest proportion of labour migrants. Upper Shire, though not fertile, is more prosperous, benefiting from the tobacco- and cotton-growing industries, and from the dried-fish trade.[4]

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE[5]

### Kinship and Local Grouping

Among the Yao succession is matrilineal and marriage mainly matrilocal. According to some informants succession formerly passed down the line of brothers, as with the Bemba, but it now passes direct to the eldest sister's eldest son, or to descendants of other sisters in order of seniority.[6] Chiefly succession follows the same rule, but the most senior may be set aside for a more suitable candidate.[7]

Clan names, *lukoryo*, are inherited matrilineally, and formerly designated exogamous units,[8] but the marriage prohibition has now ceased to operate. Holders of the same clan name are unable to trace descent from a common ancestress, and for commoners clan names seem to have quite lost their significance; they are, however, carefully remembered in the chiefly lines and in other lines of hereditary rank, such as village headmen.

Within the general kinship grouping of the clan, a smaller group is recognized,

[1] Werner, 1906, p. 144; Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, pp. 20–2, describes a round hut.

[2] 1931 Census information is taken because the district boundaries were changed between 1931 and 1945, so that the information in the 1945 Census would not be susceptible of comparison with that given in the 1937 Survey of Male Adult Population in the *Bell Report*, Appendix A.

[3] *Bell Report*, 1938, Appendix A.

[4] Smith, 1937.

[5] Information, unless otherwise stated, is from Mitchell, and relates to south Nyasaland Yao.

[6] Johnston, 1897, p. 471; Meredith Sanderson, 1920, p. 370. *Cf.* Macdonald, 1882, vol. i, p. 187, who says that brothers inherit before sister's son.

[7] Ibid., p. 189.

[8] Stannus, 4, 1922, p. 236.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



631 643 175 Matipwiri, etc.), displaced them southwards and so established chiefdoms of their own. Mkumba moved to the south and Nkata set up a fortress on Mount Mangoche, from which vantage-point he resisted British conquest for many years. Kawinga and Liwonde, whose clan-name was also *ambewe*, had moved in with Nkata but continued across the Shire River to settle in the Kongwe Hills to the west of Lake Malombe. Later, Kawinga and Liwonde re-crossed the Shire and moved south-eastwards until they reached Mount Chikala. This in the meantime had been occupied by Malemia. Kawinga and Liwonde succeeded in dislodging Malemia who retired to the Malosa Range, where he is situated to-day. Liwonde then left the mountain to settle on the east shore of the Shire River.

631 643 The arrangement of these particular chiefdoms in Administrative districts therefore reflects the social relationships among the chiefs. Between Malemia and the two *ambewe* chiefs, Kawinga and Liwonde, there is an uninhabited forest reserve and a mountain range. Liwonde and Kawinga who can trace their descent matrilineally from a common ancestress and who are to-day perpetual [1] brothers, together with their minor chiefs, share the Liwonde district. In spite of the opposition of these two chiefs which arises from their position as chiefs of independent chiefdoms, they sometimes meet and visit each other. Chiwalo, who from the Administrative point of view is under Kawinga, is in fact more closely related to Liwonde and has much more to do with him. But Chiwalo's headmen usually appeal to Kawinga, not Liwonde, in their difficulties. Within Kawinga's area at a funeral or an installation ceremony of an important headman in the northern areas, representatives of the nearby chieftaincies Ngokwe, Chikweo, Chiwalo and Kawinga will be present. In the south, the representatives of only Chamba, Mposa and Kawinga are likely to be present. Headmen, if they come from Liwonde's area, do so because of kinship connection and not because they are representatives of Liwonde.

[61]

The relationships of Jalasi and to some extent Nyambi, with Kawinga and Liwonde, are much more distant. Kawinga and Liwonde stand opposed to Jalasi in spite of the fact that Jalasi shares their clan-name. I have never known of Jalasi coming to visit Kawinga or Liwonde. Jalasi's area extends well down

[1] i.e. the offices are fixed perpetually in this relationship. See p. 122.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



riages between the chiefs and Newcomers and as a result there are 3·9 per cent of the Newcomer headmen who are linked affinally to the chiefs. The proportion of affinally-linked headmen in the two categories is approximately the same. The major differences are among the proportions of headmen linked by matrilineal and patrilateral ties to the chief.

### Clanship with the Chief

A more numerous category is those who are related to the chief, not by common descent but by clanship.

Informants tell me that before the Whites came to Nyasaland, each person took the clan-name of his mother. People who had the same clan-name were said to be ' of one kind ' (*lukosyo lwamo*). The word *lukosyo* had no other meaning but ' kind ' or ' sort ', and the word *mtundu* is frequently used as a synonym. If a man is asked his *lukosyo*, he is as likely as not to give the reply ' Yao ' or ' Machinga ', i.e. his tribal origin. By extension it follows that if two people have the same clan-name inherited from their mothers, and their mothers in turn have inherited it from their mothers, and so on, eventually there must be a common ancestress. The two people therefore call each other ' brother '. However, among the Yao there are no stories of the origin of clans and only vague traditions of a common clan ancestress. I often questioned Yao about their clan-names and joked with them that though they were Invaders they shared the same clan-names as their subjects. The clan-names I found among the Machinga Yao were *apiri*, *amilasi*, *ambewe*, *abanda*, *asimbiri*, *amwale*, *angoma*, and these clan-names also appear among the Marawi group of tribes (Cewa, Manganja, Cipeta, Mbo, etc.), the Lakeside Tonga of Chinteche district, and the Mpotola and Lomwe or Nguru from Portuguese East Africa. The Achisi Yao under Katuli, a group related to the Mataka Yao from Portuguese East Africa, do not have these clan-names, nor, as far as I know do the Yao in Tanganyika. Clan-names, therefore, may be a feature of the Machinga Yao in Nyasaland, acquired as a result of their contact with the Marawi and other indigenous peoples of that country. It is significant that the clan-names are not as a rule common Yao words for everyday objects in the same way that clan-names amongst, say, the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia, are names of plants, animals and other natural phenomena. The word

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



622 643 614 *amilasi* is used for bamboos and once an informant when pressed told me a tale of a group of people who in dire starvation ate bamboo leaves and were thenceforth called after the bamboos. This story, however, was discredited by others and I pass it off as unimportant. There is, however, some evidence that the words *apiri amilasi*, *ambewe* and so on, are commonly used in Nyanja, and possibly amongst the Lakeside Tonga who were once part of the Marawi peoples, for objects other than clan-names.

614 582 Informants say that people with the same clan-name could not marry in the past,[1] so that the clan appears to have had the characteristics of an exogamous descent group. The position to-day is vastly different. Not only do people take the clan-names of their fathers, but many young people do not even know their clan-names at all.

614 611 567 At this point I should make it clear that the modern confusion about clan-names is no doubt partly due to the emphasis placed on patrilineal descent by the purveyors of White culture, the Administrators and the Missionaries, and also by the same emphasis in Islamic tradition which has influenced most Yao groups. Another factor in the situation is that slave descent still markedly affects social relationships in modern Nyasaland. Its significance here is that when a man took a slave-wife in the old days, his children by her took his clan-name, and not hers. Patrilineal descent of the clan-name therefore tends to point to the slave origin of a person. People who are able to point to a freeman ancestry are proud of this fact and are proud to be able to claim a clan-name associated with a long line of matrilineal ancestors, particularly if there were some well-known men among them. On the other hand, I found it a fairly safe indication that, if I could find no information about an ancestress, particularly her clan-name, then I was dealing with a group descended from a slave. A third factor is that some people 614 611 explained their lack of knowledge of a clan-name by the state of social unrest and confusion at the end of the last century. As a result of the incursions of the Ngoni, Nguru and slave-raiding Yao and Arab groups, and finally the punitive expeditions of the British and the Portuguese, villages were destroyed and groups annihilated. People lost contact with their relatives, even

[1] Confirmed by Hynde, R. S., 'Marriage and relationship among the Yao', *Nyasa News*, vii (1895), 217–18.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



their parents. Therefore many people who were children then, but adult to-day, say that their parents were 'lost running from the wars' and that they were never told their clan-names.

Whatever are the factors which have led to the comparative lack of importance of the clan-name in the social relationships of commoners to-day, the clan-name has preserved its significance in the political structure. I have already said that the clan-names associated with particular village headmanships and chieftaincies are well remembered, and this fact is not without significance. It seems likely that the clan-name was used in earlier times by groups as a method of claiming protection. The same set of clan-names appears throughout the tribes which surround the Machinga Yao. It seems likely that the adoption of clan-names facilitated their incursion into the country, and it is certain that insurgent Yao groups have used the clan-name as excuses to move into an area, and gradually to extend their dominance over it.

For example, in Malemia's area there is an Nyanja village headman called Nyani, who has the clan-name *amwale*. Stannus reports that when Malemia moved into this area he claimed brotherhood with Nyani because of the clan-name, and was able to obtain from him the land extending from the Likwenu River to the Namadsi River, a district 30 to 40 miles long.[1] Again when Kawinga fled from Chikala after the British raids on it, he went to the land of Nkanyela, an Mpotola chief in Portuguese East Africa, who is also an *ambewe*. That the clan-name is used essentially in this political field is illustrated by the relationships of Mposa to Mbande. Mposa, the son of Kawinga I, settled in the country of the Nyanja chief Mbande, who had the same clan-name as Mposa, viz. *amilasi*. Mposa calls Mbande 'brother' to-day and Mbande holds a position of honour and rank in Mposa's chiefdom. It is significant that other village headmen such as Cilombo, Mbalika and Mkwinda also have the same clan-name, but they do not claim kinship to Mposa. In modern times, when there is no longer any great danger to be incurred in moving from one part of the country to another, it seems likely that the necessity for some mechanism, whereby the friendship of otherwise hostile groups could be secured, falls away. In other words, the significance of the clan-name is gradually disappearing as its functions atrophy.

[1] Stannus, 'The Wayao of Nyasaland', 237.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

# CHAPTER VI

## THE LINEAGE FRAMEWORK OF VILLAGES

### Matrilineal Kinship

TO outsiders a village appears to be an undifferentiated whole and in interaction with other villages it acts as such. But within the village, social actions are determined by membership of kinship groups whose genealogical relationships to each other differ from one village to another. The village headman who represents the unity of the village is usually a kinsman of all the villagers, but the links to him are different and diverse. Yet he commands the leadership of the village, not so much by his kinship to the villagers, for a villager may have other mother's brothers and fathers in the village, but by his position in a political structure, where he represents the village to outsiders and to external authority.

Yao social groups are organized on a principle of matrilineal descent but we shall see that, although this is the main principle, it is modified by the general political mould into which villages are forced. We have already seen that, at least in the lines of important headmen, clan-names are inherited from the mother.[1] This is the simplest and most direct way in which matrilineal descent affects social relationships. The principle of matrilineal descent is far more important in organizing the smallest group which acts corporately within the village—the matrilineage.

A significant feature of Yao social structure is that the village organization tends to cut across lineages. In the process of segmentation of matrilineages, which I shall discuss in detail later, new villages are formed. When this happens the dissident kin usually set up their homesteads a good distance from the original or parent village. The links between different sections of the same matrilineage, therefore, tend to become lost, and the new village, conscious of its own identity and unity, gradually loses its links with the parent village. The general structural relationship between the villages as wholes, and their headmen as their representatives, is fixed at the time when the division takes place, and this is remembered. But the actual genealogical

[1] See Chap. III, p. 71.

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



village but called it Mtuweni and not Mpumbe village. The positions of the lineages in the village would have become inverted, and the patrilaterally-linked lineage become the dominant lineage. In this way villages may change their name or they may acquire two names, as happened to Mlungu village in Nyambi's area. Here a man called Masalu took over the control of the village. He was the son of the previous Mlungu and the village is known to-day by either of these names. The interesting point is what will happen when he dies, because there are now sisters' sons in a distant lineage old enough to take charge of the village. The rule is, as we have seen, that the matrilineal relatives always have the first claim.

### Paternity and Segmentation

It is interesting to note that the paternity of brothers or sisters is not a differentiating feature in these social relationships. In the discussions which have hinged upon the care of sorority-groups I have never heard the paternity of brothers and sisters brought up as a reason why they should hold more or less closely together. The father is important in social life as I point out later, but while groups may be linked through paternity, it does not lead to a second principle of segmentation within the lineage.[1] This is manifestly the result of the fundamental difference in a system of matrilineal descent, where paternity is of less consequence than maternity is in a patrilineal structure. Among the Yao, unlike the patrilineal peoples of Southern and Northern Africa, no marriage payments are made; divorce is easy and frequent, and there are no disputes about the custody of children, who always belong to their mother's group whether they are illegitimate or not.[2] This is consistent with the view of the husband as a mere begetter of children. Among the Yao, the

[1] This aspect of segmentation in patrilineal peoples, with different wives of men as points of fission, is brought out particularly in Evans-Pritchard, E. E., *The Nuer*, Oxford University Press (London, 1940), and *Marriage and the Family among the Nuer*, R.-L.I. Paper, No. 11 (1944); Fortes, M., *The Dynamics of Clanship*, and *The Web of Kinship*; Kuper, H., *A Black Aristocracy*, Oxford University Press (London, 1947).

[2] This has been worked out in Gluckman, M., 'Kinship and Marriage among the Lozi of Northern Rhodesia and the Zulu of Natal', in Radcliffe-Brown, A. R., and Forde, C. D. (eds.), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Oxford University Press for the International African Institute (London, 1950).

2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7



543 611 sisters are the points of cleavage in the matrilineage and the group of uterine sisters is seldom divided, unless their daughters are old enough to form a corporate group and to move off with their mother to found a new village under their brother.

### The Spatial Representation of Lineage Segmentation

361 613 621 The segmentation of the matrilineage is also shown in the spatial distribution of the huts in a village. The daughters of the women of the matrilineage set up their huts near to their mothers', and as this continues over a number of years, the internal segmentation of the matrilineage is automatically reflected in the disposition of huts. Most Yao villages will show this spatial representation of social distance, some more clearly than others. The clearest example I have is in Mesi section of Majaja village, Nyambi's area. The disposition of the huts is set out in the village plan in Appendix C. Here are five fairly distinct groups of huts in the village. Four are descendants of four uterine sisters, the children of the previous Majaja. The space between these four groups is cleared and paths reticulate among the huts. About 200 yards away, the fifth group is out of sight of the others and must be reached by a path leading through the fields. In this cluster of huts live the children of the uterine brother of the four sisters. The matrilineal relatives of Majaja live about half a mile away in a quite distinct cluster.

In Cikoja village the same principles are at work but the situation is somewhat obscured by the number of patrilaterally-linked relatives. A glance at the village plan in Appendix D shows that the major segments, denoted by the symbols Ma and Mc in the plan, are quite distinct in the old village site, the huts of Ma being separated from those of Mc by a broad path and by a patch of bamboos. In the new village site across the stream the same general segmentation is shown where the two sections, $Ma_1$ and $Ma_2$, are separated by a path.[1] The separation of the clusters of huts is difficult to represent on a diagram because not only are the huts placed in discrete clusters, but they face in towards one another and the space between them is kept clean. Between the clusters there may be rubbish heaps and small garden patches. I describe later how the village continually

[1] I describe how this section of the village came to be across the river on p. 169.

585 dress of her married life begins. The man and woman live together peaceably enough as a rule, each attending to his own sphere of work. The man builds the house, the woman
962 tends the fowls; she sweeps and cooks, she is the bearer of wood and drawer of water. The man hunts, fishes, makes mats, baskets, the grain store, game traps, and herb-cloth; he looks after the tobacco, and makes the snuff, while his wife brews the beer. He it is who fashions the gourd vessels and carves the spoons, while the woman is the potter (Pl. III, 4) and pipe-maker. Together they sow and together they harvest, but to the woman falls the monotonous drudgery of pounding and sifting the corn for flour.

892 The Yao have a custom like that of the Anyanja. A sister brings to the house of the newly wedded pair a log of green wood from a mkanga tree which is very hard; the log
[522] may be two feet in diameter and four feet long. Should the bride not become pregnant before it is burned away, the husband is laughed at and they may both be teased by having
[558] many logs brought to the house. A man who has no children is much despised and there is a saying, "He must have eaten some ground-nuts," punning on the word for a thick-
[537] skinned variety of ground-nut, chimbumbu, a word which also means sterility. An impotent man may, with the consent of his wife, introduce some male friend into the house, any children born in consequence being claimed as the husband's. He usually chooses some friend from a distance to obviate any attachment springing up between him and the wife. Two married couples may, all consenting, exchange consorts for the night, but they never live together like this for long periods.

582 There is one well-defined marriage taboo; a man may not marry a woman of his own clan. In the old days, he was also restricted to his own tribe, except in the case of slave
[671] wives and wives by capture. Since the clan is inherited from the mother,[1] a man may not
[587] marry the daughters of his maternal aunts, but he may marry his other female cousins. He may not marry two sisters nor a deceased wife's sister; neither do two brothers marry two sisters.

595 The number of wives is limited only by the husband's ability to provide for them. In addition to free wives, a man might formerly have a number of slave wives. The head wife is called *kungwi*, the other wives, *wanyumba*. The word given by Macdonald, *akungwi*,[2] meaning the junior wives, is a Chinyanja word and, I think, wrongly applied.

532 It has been said that a man always marries into the village of his wife. For this reason,
[919] female children are always prized as it means an increase in the number of able-bodied men added to the village. In rare cases, the wife might be taken to the husband's village,
[583] as is the Anyanja practice.[3] This, of course, is true in the case of chiefs and headmen. Here, we may also note that no payment is made for the wife and no dowry is received with her.

584 To revert to betrothal, occasionally the spouses will not agree to the marriage and a
893 runaway match takes place, but in the end, the marriage is usually regularized by the spouses coming to an agreement. If, however, the woman has in the meantime become

[1] Vide infra, p. 262. [2] Op. cit., p. 150. [3] Stanner, op. cit., p. 258.

593 601 The children of maternal uncles (C 6 and 8) and of paternal aunts (C 5 and 4) are called *wenkwa wakwinami* (*dog. wakwani*), and, conversely, the children of maternal aunts (C 7 and 9) and of paternal uncles (C 1 and 3) are called "brothers and sisters"; one would address the other as "*shemandi*" or "*ashimwene*," but either is reluctant to the other.

601 605 It is interesting, therefore, to note that cousinship is of two kinds: the relationship between a child and his maternal aunts' children or his paternal uncles' children is cousin, whereas the relationship with his maternal uncles' children or his paternal aunts' children is national.

[611] It is easily understood why the maternal aunts' children are considered as brothers and sisters, as among the Yao, matrilineal descent is the rule, the children taking the clan of

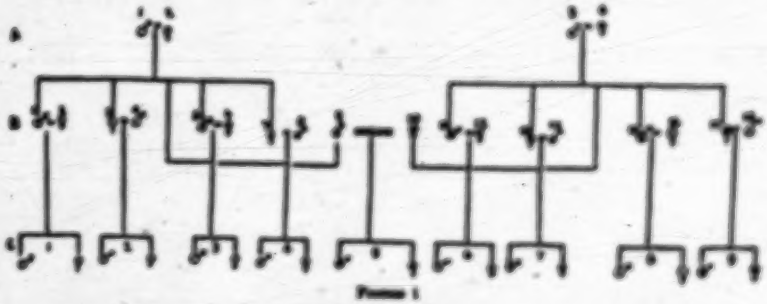


Figure 1

the mother. In the diagram, this is indicated in black. That the paternal uncles' children bear the same relationship would seem to indicate that matrilineal descent is not absolute but that dual descent from both parents is recognized.

Children C 5 may not marry C 7 and 9, nor C 1 and 3. In the case of the former, this is because persons of the same clan may not marry, but in the case of the latter, no such reason is given but they are simply said to be brothers and sisters. Children C 5 may [582] marry their cousins C 6 and 8 and C 2 and 4, but this is not very common as it is said such marriages are always unhappy.

601 604 The wife of a maternal uncle (B 12) speaks of her nephew by marriage (C 8) as mwene, husband, because, in the event of her husband's death, this nephew would inherit from him and he might marry the widow.

601 A parent-in-law or child-in-law is called *mkwapwe* indifferently. Paternal and maternal grand-parents, and great-nephs and nenis are all called *mdodji*; a grand-child, *chinukulu*.

The words *nini* and *nenne* commonly mean father and mother, but, as given above, there are other words for these two parents, whereas *nini* and *nenne* are applied to certain aunts

Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949
FT7 Yao FT7

[P. 141 8]

[8] The people with whom this paper is concerned[1] occupy that part of Nyasaland between the Chikala Range in the South; Mount Mangoche in the North; the Shire River to the West; and the Portuguese East African border to the East. This area is represented on the accompanying diagrammatic map. A more detailed description of the general social organization of the Yao in this area, and of their history and general cultural background is to be published shortly.[2] At [36] this point it is sufficient to say that the Yao are semi-subsistence cultivators living in village settlements ranging from a few huts to sixty or more, with an average of about twelve. This represents say a population average of about 40 per village but ranging from 15 to over 200. [62] These village settlements are inhabited by groups of kinsmen. In general there is a matrilineal core [61] of kinsmen of whom the village headman, who [622] has the same name as the village, is one. In some more complex villages there are subsidiary matrilineages related to the matrilineal core agnatically

[P.141C]

FT? Tao FT?

62 through one or other incumbent of the position of village headman.[4] Succession to posts of author-
61 ity, including that of the chief, is matrilineal.
62 Ideally the succession should pass to the first-born son of a man's eldest sister, but this is not always followed, for the personal qualities of the successor are most important.

16 The total African population of the area studied is 65,000. There are one or two Indian traders and two Europeans permanently resident in the area. One European is a missionary in the north-east corner and the other an Agricultural officer in the north centre of the area. Part of
63 the area is administered by the District Commissioner, Zomba, and part by District Commissioner, Fort Johnston, and these officers tour the districts under their jurisdiction. Occasionally other White officials and labour recruiters appear, but in the main, Whites are not often seen in this
491 area. The one road traversing it is usually impassable for a part of the rainy season.